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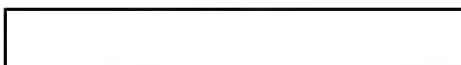
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USSR-SYRIA-EGYPT: Asad's trips to Moscow and Cairo reflect increased Soviet-Arab contacts. (Page 4)



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USSR-SYRIA-EGYPT: Syrian President Asad's visits to Moscow and Cairo in late September are the latest reflection of recently increased Soviet-Arab contacts.

Asad's travels are being heralded in Middle Eastern media as an attempt to strike a new balance in the strained relations between the Soviets and Egyptians.

The Syrian leader's discussions in Moscow may have helped to prepare the way for the Soviet-Egyptian summit talks which, according to a Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, will be held in a few months. After Asad's visit to Egypt, Cairo announced that Premier Sidqi would go to Moscow on 16 October.

The Soviets, still smarting from their forced withdrawal from Egypt last July, have been working hard in recent weeks to restore their image in the area. Medical supplies have been delivered to fedayeen elements, Lebanon was offered a "defense" package of an undisclosed kind, Damascus itself has received considerable new military equipment and units of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron have visited Syrian ports.

Moscow's gestures toward Syria suggest that, in addition to his mediation role, Asad may have discussed his own accounts with the Soviets. For some time the USSR has been pressing Damascus to sign a friendship agreement similar to those earlier accepted by Egypt and Iraq. Asad has resisted a treaty so far, reportedly because he believes Syria's interests are best served with less formal ties to its chief supplier of military equipment and economic aid. [REDACTED]

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